

Catching YOUR Memories

THE PODCAST

WITH DIANE ATWOOD

Episode aired June 16, 2022

This transcript is mostly the product of AI so please do not expect perfection.

Diane Atwood: Hey everyone, this is Diane Atwood, and you are listening to the Catching Your Memories podcast. Everybody has a memory, a story, or an experience to share if only someone would ask. That's where I come in. In this episode, Keegan Albaugh tells us how becoming a father changed not only his life but also his career path. When he discovered there weren't a lot of resources available for new dads in his community, he facilitated a small support group. The success of that group made him realize that yes, there was a need for more resources for new fathers. Responding to that need has become his passion, and Keegan is now the Executive Director of a non-profit organization called Dad Guild. From a support group for seven new dads to an organization with more than 600 members. How did he make that happen? Let's find out.

Diane Atwood: Well, welcome, Keegan, to the Catching Your Memories podcast. And you are making tons of memories.

Keegan Albaugh: Thanks for having me, Diane.

Diane Atwood: Full disclosure, I want people to know that you are my son-in-law, an amazing man, father of my two granddaughters, Coraline, who's six, and Penny, who's three and a half. And I think you're doing a great job.

Keegan Albaugh: Thanks. It doesn't always feel that way, but we just try our best and hope for the best.

Diane Atwood: Yeah. Well, so far it seems like it's going pretty well. I want to talk about you being a father, but before we do talk about that, I'd like you to explain to us what Dad Guild is all about.

Keegan Albaugh: In a nutshell. Okay, I'll try my best. is a nonprofit organization based out of Burlington, Vermont. The mission is to support and empower fathers by offering opportunities for connection, education, and community engagement. And so, it's really just to provide a space for non-birth partners and dads to connect with each other, do stuff with their kids, without their kids. It's just kind of like set up a supportive network and just really normalize positive fatherhood engagement.

Diane Atwood: And when you use that term non-birth partner, that isn't just like you, you didn't actually give birth, but it encompasses other situations as well, correct?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. I think families look a lot of different ways these days. You might have same-sex couples or folks who've adopted kids or aunts, uncles, grandparents who are acting in a caregiver role or things can look really different across the board. And so, we just want to make sure, try to provide a space that a lot of times that the person who gives birth or the primary caregiver, there can be a lot of support there and a lot of groups, and we're just trying to make sure that we're being inclusive and that folks who maybe find themselves in that kind of like, father-figure role or identify as a dad, but they might not look like me and just making sure that they also have a space in the community to be connected to.

Diane Atwood: Okay. So we'll talk in detail about that and what you offer because you have sort of the umbrella organization, but you have some specific opportunities for people. When I say specific opportunities, you have programming. And so there's the programming

that's for everybody, and then you also try to meet the needs of individuals as well?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. I think right now we have about eleven different programs. And so we have playgroups that dads can come and do with their kids.

Then we do Dad's night out or Dad's day out events, and that's just for fathers to come and connect and talk about parenting and bond together. And then we also do book groups, we do workshops, we do Zoom check-ins, we have a peer support fire group, we do some community-based volunteering. There's an app called Marco Polo that we use for, like, video support, video messaging in groups. And we just had a podcast come out, just trying to provide as many different avenues to encourage dads to be involved in their caregiver roles as possible.

Diane Atwood: And we will go into more detail later, but I want to talk about you being a dad.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, sure.

Diane Atwood: So, even growing up, did you know you wanted to be a dad?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. I can't pinpoint what day it was or what year or anything but, yeah, I think I was always excited about the idea of, you know, finding a partner and starting a family together and raising kids. I think part of it is so ingrained in our culture, where I grew up watching TGIF on ABC when I was a kid, where it was like Full House and Family Matters and Perfect Strangers, where, yeah, that's kind of what you saw, oh, that looks fun. Didn't put a whole lot of thought into it. It's like, oh, yeah, that's just kind of what you do, but I was excited for that.

Diane Atwood: Now, I know your parents and they're wonderful people, but I can't picture your house being like Full House.

Keegan Albaugh: No, no definitely it wasn't. But, yeah, my parents are lovely, fantastic people, and I feel so privileged to grow up with such supportive parents and a loving family.

Diane Atwood: And I'm so grateful that you found a loving partner and my daughter. It's hard work, though, isn't it, being a parent?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. I mean, it's beautiful. It's great. I love it. And also it's really challenging. And then there's times you're like, oh, man, what are we doing? It's exhausting, your brain is just. I feel like I have so many things I'm trying to keep track of, and there's just so little time for it, it feels like anything these days. So, yeah, it's not easy.

Diane Atwood: Well, you know, our lives, they take unexpected turns. Becoming a father was a turn you did expect but did you ever think that it would lead to you leading an organization for fathers?

Keegan Albaugh: No. It's funny, like, in my career exploration, I was an educator prior to this role, and I liked working with teenagers, but I kind of struggled finding like, what am I going to do for the rest of my life? And for a while, I fantasized about opening up a food truck, and I got into, like, oh, maybe I'll package some food and sell in grocery stores, but nothing really took off. I just knew I wanted to do something different. But, yeah, I had no idea that becoming a dad would actually not only change my life personally but actually turn into my career right now. So, yeah, it's actually had a pretty significant impact on my life.

Diane Atwood: So, probably for the first year and a half after Coraline was born, you were immersed in figuring out parenting.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, it was tough, especially, I worked in an alternative high school, and folks really stress self-care and it was a demanding job, but you'd come home at 04:00 and take care of yourself once you have a kid, the self-care becomes really challenging because all of a sudden you're working with clients all day, then you get home and you have the most important client in the world. And you're like, man, when do I get to take care of myself? And, yeah, it was an eye-opener to parenthood.

Diane Atwood: And one of the things that I have observed is how well you and my daughter work together. I'm sure that there are moments when you'd like to just run in opposite directions, but you have this ability to sit down and talk things through and figure out how are we going to meet this challenge or that challenge. I also know that when I became a mother, there were some support groups. There weren't very many, but now it seems there are tons of support groups for mothers or opportunities for mothers to talk to other mothers. But what's out there for dads? What was out there for dads for you?

Keegan Albaugh: There wasn't much, and I'll say too, there's a number of groups for new moms or expectant mothers and I also think that there should be more because I think that transition into parenthood is just, there needs to be so much more support and services out there. There's still not enough for people expecting to give birth. There's very little for dads, like, if anything. There was one group that met Tuesday nights here in another organization for dads, but it

was four to 07:00 p.m. once a week, so it was kind of tricky timing because we had a routine where we were doing dinner at 05:00 and 06:00, starting bedtime. So it just didn't quite work with our schedule and trying to think back like, yeah, there was really nothing that was father specific. There'd be playgroups and things, but a lot of times you don't see too many dads at those.

Diane Atwood: So, you didn't find anything exactly, right? You were involved in starting something way back then.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, that was gosh back in 2017 when Steph, she was involved at a local yoga studio doing, there was some prenatal and then postpartum groups and some yoga. And they also had a support group for new moms called Vermamas. And the owner of the studio is Evolution Yoga. She asked, hey, if anyone knows any dads who'd be interested in facilitating a group for new dads, let me know. And Steph was like, oh, actually, I think Keegan would love to do that because I've always really enjoyed just like, being vulnerable and being honest in those spaces for men to be engaging in that work. I'm a huge fan of and also selfishly, I was like, yeah, I want a group, that sounds great. And so, yeah, I reached out to the owner, and we started a group that met once a month for nine months. And there's like seven dads in there. But, yeah, just like a support group that we'd be once a month for a couple of hours and just do a bunch of prompts and people share with one another.

Diane Atwood: So, I think it's interesting when you use those terms, being vulnerable, being honest. That's not the norm?

Keegan Albaugh: Not with men a whole lot. I think in our society, a lot of men, we've been kind of encouraged to put up a mask or to not share too much. I think we've come a long way, but I don't think it's super common to find spaces where men are just walking in and sharing what they're thinking and feeling, particularly around parenthood, where I think there are these messages out there that it's just such a beautiful time and everyone's so happy and it's so great. And then we start feeling all these other things are like, oh, actually, I feel angry, I feel depressed, I feel anxious, I'm feeling all these things. But who am I talking to about that? And so, I think as people go through that process, I think a lot of folks realize how important it is to have someone other than their partner to be connected with and sharing and talking about these experiences with.

Diane Atwood: And so, that's what happened in the support group?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, the group started, I remember the first night, and I asked people, like, hey, why did you come here? And pretty much every guy's response was because my partner, my wife made me. And I was like, oh-oh, that's not great, but you're here, okay. But then by month nine, this group had developed this really strong sense of identity, and people had really shared some pretty honest stuff, which was really amazing. And by month nine, when we were ending, the kind of response was, wow, this was huge, and it filled this hole that I didn't really know existed. And how do we keep this going?

Diane Atwood: I'm curious if you discovered something about yourself in that process, participating in leading this group?

Keegan Albaugh: I think for me, maybe just some confidence of like, I can do this, and it was interesting to be in a group where it's not like I had specific training or had a background in like, I didn't have a degree being a dad or anything, being in a space you're like, okay, I guess I'm the one facilitating this. And then by the end, this group has this identity, and I would say the energy of the group obviously comes from the people who are within it, and that's what makes it so beautiful. And also it's kind of like, hey, I can set up these spaces, I can just kind of make this happen. So, I think that kind of had a light bulb for me of I don't think it's necessary that I have this tremendous skill at doing this, but it's more of this is a passion, and I think someone just needs to step in and be like, hey, I'm passionate about this, and this is a need so, I'm just going to do it, and yeah.

Diane Atwood: But you didn't continue doing that support group, right? That ended?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, that ended and we tried getting a second one going a few months later, but not enough people signed up for it, so it didn't happen, and it was like, okay, well, that didn't happen, but something needs to, so.

Diane Atwood: So, as I remember the story, you and one of the other dads in the group started meeting and brainstorming.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. So, this other father who is in the group, Nicholas Kramer, we were talking and he was interested. He's like, oh, yeah, let's talk about stuff about how this could look. And so I was talking to Nick the other day about this. This is funny because we went to a bar on a Saturday afternoon, and we got there, and I think he thought we were just going to hang out and chat. But

I pulled out a notebook, and I was like, okay, and Nick was like, whoa, this guy is actually serious, he has a notebook. I was like, yeah, we're going to write this stuff down. So, we just brainstormed a bunch of ideas and then started researching what else exists elsewhere in this country or in the world, and then just started coming up with some ideas from there.

Diane Atwood: And were there other groups that you found that you modeled Dad Guild after or just got ideas from?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, there's not a whole lot that we were finding. There's two that we kind of modeled a little bit of what we're doing after. One is a nationwide organization called The City Dads. And what they do is they support dad groups happening in different cities in the United States. And they did a lot of cool kind of dads getting together and stuff with their kids, and we reached out to them, but they only support people getting groups started in Metropolitan areas, and unfortunately, even though Burlington is the largest city in Vermont didn't meet their qualifications, which is fine. They gave us some resources. And then there's another organization in London, Ontario, up in Canada. There's an organization we found there called Dad Club. And that one I think we were really drawn to because they did this combination of stuff with dads, stuff with kids, and also community engagement and volunteering. And they also made it cool because I think one of the things that I've noticed when sometimes there is fatherhood stuff is that they try to pull at your heartstrings, and it's a little sappy, which is great, it's beautiful. But I get curious. Does that appeal to the average guy? Are they seeing that and being like, oh, yeah, I really want to go to that. And I think there's an element of, hey, you gotta kind of make this cool. You've got to make it fun, especially when you're a parent and you're so pressed for time and specifically thinking of men, and we talked about, who aren't quick to be vulnerable. I think that if you say, we're going to get in a group and talk in a circle that might turn a lot of guys off. But if you're like, hey, we're going to meet up at the brewery and play some video games and also talk about parenting. I think guys are like, oh, actually, that seems kind of cool, I'm going to do that. And so that's what we did.

Diane Atwood: And then there's a third man who came on board, right?.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, Marlon Fisher. It was kind of serendipitous one day, Coraline's daycare was closed. It was a Friday. And so I took the day off of work, and I went to gosh, the Radio Bean in town. It's like a coffee shop, and they have kids' music on Fridays. So I went there and Marlon was there who I'd seen

around town, but we chatted. He had his child, and we chatted for a little bit and then said goodbye. And then that same afternoon, he was with his kid and I had Coraline still and so, we talked for a bit, and he was a stay-at-home dad for a while and just a big personality. And when we started to think about maybe wanting to make this a nonprofit organization, we needed a board, a board of three people. And so Marlon was the other guy we brought on to meet our minimum requirements of a nonprofit organization board in the state of Vermont.

Diane Atwood: Okay, so you went from just brainstorming ideas, finding out what might be available in other parts of the country to a nonprofit organization.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. We also had set up a series of meetings over the course of three weeks and just invited all the dads that we knew to grab some food, have a drink, and brainstorm what exists? What would you like to see? What would be cool? 20 different dads came to that over the course of three weeks, and we just jotted down a bunch of ideas and then became a nonprofit, which you just have to file some paperwork and pay some money and come up with some bylaws and stuff like that. But yeah, so we became legit.

Diane Atwood: Was it March 2019 that you became official or Dad Guild became official?

Keegan Albaugh: It was in the late summer of 2018 that's when we became a Facebook group and started putting together newsletters. I think we have two dozen dads in our Facebook group. But then, yeah, March 2019 is when we officially became a nonprofit organization.

Diane Atwood: And how many members do you have today?

Keegan Albaugh: Just over 600 dads are connected now.

Diane Atwood: That's amazing. And these dads are primarily in the Burlington area?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, Burlington is in Chittenden County here in Vermont. And yeah, it's primarily Chittenden County folks. But we've been having some conversations with different partners throughout the state, and there's been some interest around replicating what we're doing in other communities. And we're interested in doing that in addition to establishing a more formal statewide network of folks doing fatherhood work, so we can share resources and do some more advocacy work and see where that goes.

Diane Atwood: And the Facebook group. Well, did you have a Facebook page or a group or both?

Keegan Albaugh: We have both. We started with a group and now we have a group and a page. So the group's private. The intention of that is for dads to join that group, and then they can share with each other and get advice, and then the page is just more general, kind of like posting what our organization is up to.

Diane Atwood: Okay. How many members in the group?

Keegan Albaugh: I think we just had, like 420.

Diane Atwood: Wow, and it's an active group. Dads share back and forth and ask questions and vent and whatever?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. And I think whether it's people sometimes like, hey, I'm just going to the park. Or like, hey, I found a sale at this store on Church Street downtown in Burlington for kids' clothing. You can check this out. And then also, I think one of the most beautiful things that I see is when a guy will be like, hey, I'm having a really hard time. What do you guys do to take care of yourself? Or I just need some support. And then you'll have over the course of a few days, 30 different guys will be responding. And the responses that I see, for the most part, they're not just like, oh, you got this. People take the time to write these really thoughtful, kind responses that you're just like, wow, that's so awesome. Everyone seems to be really supportive and open to everyone, which is just really fantastic.

Diane Atwood: You can't help us think of what the stereotypical description of a father is, and compare that to what it is that Dad Guild is delivering on. Not just offering, but delivering on.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, there's a lot of guys out there who I think the idea of going into a group and being vulnerable, that's not something that either they're not interested in it or they're not comfortable about it or they feel like they don't need it for whatever reason. That's totally fine. How do we still get those folks into our community and how do we, you know, because the idea of just exposing people to sure, you don't have to do this, just know that we are talking about this topic or I think it's important like you come out to play disc golf one day with us, that you're having fun telling jokes and stuff, and also to hear other guys share and open up a bit. Just to hear it, I think goes a long way.

Diane Atwood: Have you ever had dads who have been forced to go? Promise their wives, all right, I'll go, I'll go. And then they walk away feeling great and wanting to come back.

Keegan Albaugh: A response that I've heard from a lot of people is I didn't know that I was looking for something like this, but now that I've found it, this feels really good. And some guys they'll come to a playgroup and the mom and the child will come with them, which that's totally fine if that makes you feel comfortable. Or maybe mom is also hoping to meet some people as well. That's totally fine. And I do hear, I get a lot of outreach from moms who are saying, yeah, I'm trying to get my husband to go, but he's not interested or doesn't have the time or has said, like, he doesn't want any more friends. And whatever the reason might be, it's like, okay. But I always get curious because I'm like, if your partner is saying you should go to this, and I think it'll be really good for you, and we have, the data that we collect from surveys that we do shows that people are more confident parents. Their partners say it has a positive impact on them and their family. They make more friends, which is tied to research that you live longer and you're less stressed and all those things you're like, oh, I'm just really curious as to what is the barrier that's preventing some folks to participate and how can we continue to try to remove some of those barriers?

Diane Atwood: You offer a lot of programming and groups and so some opportunities you mentioned, it's okay if the female partner comes along, the mom, but that's not for all programming?

Keegan Albaugh: We definitely have programs where it's just dads going out. It's really the playgroups and some special events that we do where partners can certainly come and regularly do. But there's a lot of spaces where, hey, this is just for dads.

Diane Atwood: So, you have dads who come from all different walks of life, have had different life experiences, but there are certainly all these common threads that you have discovered. What are some of the common threads, especially for dads who might think, oh, I'm not going to fit in because of whatever reason?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. Some of the common threads that I've noticed are everyone wants to be a good dad. Everyone wants to be a good dad. Everyone loves their kids. Everyone to some level is like tired and just stressed. And to some level, and I think those things because I think that piece you said around

parenting isn't easy. And it's like, yeah, it's not. And so I think when you walk into a space and you're like, oh, here's a bunch of other guys who they all know parenting isn't easy and they all want to be the best dads that they can be, and they all want their kids to do well and they want their kids to love them. Those are pretty deep, meaningful things. Like, I want to be a good person, and that's what people are connecting over, as opposed to like, hey, we both like baseball. So that's what we're going to connect over. It's like, hey, actually, I want to connect around being I want to be the best version of myself, and I want what's best for my kids. And that's where I'm going to start this relationship with these people. And I think that's a really powerful place to start.

Diane Atwood: And then there must be some dads who really do feel like nobody understands my situation for whatever reason. And knowing you, I'm sure that you find a way to try to make a connection, to make something available to that dad.

Keegan Albaugh: Again, no matter what someone has going on in their life, that shared identity of being a father and wanting to be the best father you can be and wanting what's best for your kids and loving your kids, those core values and those core things, I think you can immediately have a lot in common with someone, so I think it's just a great place to start. And then from there, yeah. just really listening and hearing what people have to say because I've definitely met tons of dads who have a lot going on. And the first time you meet them, you're like, hey, how are you doing? And they just talk for ten minutes because you can tell you, whoa, you're carrying a lot. And it's so important for you to be connecting with other people and talking about this.

Diane Atwood: And then to ask the question, how can I help you? What do you think you need that you're not getting? But you're right. Listening.

Keegan Albaugh: And I think something, too, I mean, there's research that shows around with specifically fathers that they prefer more informal support and they prefer more peer communities, and that's how they get their information and support, as opposed to a more formalized, you know, an expert coming in, being like, hey, do this, don't do this. And I think that's what makes our community so great is that none of us are like, uh oh, yeah, we have all the answers. All of us are like, man, we are all making mistakes and learning as we go. And everyone in our community is an expert in some way and trying to find ways to like, hey,

how can you share whatever you're an expert in? How can you share that with these people? And how can we just really appreciate one another?

Diane Atwood: So you talked about early on in the interview, you talked about what you learned as a dad from leading that support group. But now you've had six years of experience and you have Dad Guild and all the other dads. How do you think you have grown up to this point?

Keegan Albaugh: Oh, man, I'm still working on a lot of things. I think for me, realizing just how anxious of a person I am and how much anxiety I have. I think being able to kind of have a deeper understanding of myself and what makes me uncomfortable. And when I'm anxious, what do I tend to do? And then it's kind of exploring that and why. And I think that's been a big piece of it. And then just being patient. And I think that piece to have just always growing. I think as the years go on, I think that's the biggest piece is that I'm never going to have it figured out and that it's just always looking at things from different perspectives and engaging in conversation with folks and trying to grow.

Diane Atwood: I did another podcast interview about motherhood with a friend of mine. And one of the things that she learned is learning, her daughter is twelve, is every phase as her child grows, it's like there's a different person there, and she has to learn something new. The mother has to learn something new. And it's like, wait a minute, wait a minute. You were just two and you were this way and what, all of a sudden you're a whole different person and I have to figure out how to cope and deal with you. Are you out of the what is it, the twos or the threes?

Keegan Albaugh: We are right in the middle of the threenager stage with Penny. She knows what she likes. She knows what she doesn't like, and she lets you know. Yeah. There's some strong personalities in the house that it's a lot of energy.

Diane Atwood: Yeah. Four strong personalities?

Keegan Albaugh: I think the two adult personalities are getting more and more tired.

Diane Atwood: Well, you need the grandmothers to come up.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah.

Diane Atwood: So you recently gave up your day job to become sort of kind of full-time at Dad Guild?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. I was President of the Board for just about three years. And so I ran Dad Guild as a volunteer with the support of the Board. But initially, I was working full-time at a mental health organization. Then I transitioned, started working full-time at a parent-child center here in Burlington, Vermont. And I worked with Dads there. Then I went down to part-time about a year ago. And then this past January of 2022, I stepped down from the board and I stepped into a ten-hour-a-week executive director role. Our capacity has increased a bit, and so at the end of May, I left my job at the parent-child center, the family room. And right now I'm working 20 hours a week at Dad Guild. And then starting July 1, probably around 30 hours in that position and hoping that can last. We'll see. But we're just going to continue trying to increase our capacity.

Diane Atwood: So you have to do fundraising. That's what nonprofits do to keep going.

Keegan Albaugh: That's what we got to do. So in addition to running programs and forming partnerships and building awareness in the community, so fundraising, writing grants, doing fundraisers, and developing relationships with businesses and donors. So, that will become a big chunk of the work.

Diane Atwood: And I'm curious about that. Developing relationships with people in the community. You've been doing that even before it became a nonprofit. How has that gone? How do people receive you when you come in and start talking about Dad Guild?

Keegan Albaugh: It's usually really well received. I think people get very excited because I think regardless of what anyone's experiences with their own father or being a parent, I think the idea of support for dads or engaging more fathers in their caregiver role, everyone gets really excited about. And a lot of the responses I hear, if someone has a young kid, they go, what's this? And then people who maybe are older are like, oh, gosh, I wish that had been around years ago. That would have been great. And so I think it's something that everyone gets excited about because I think that those stereotypes that exist of dad's not going to the playgroups or just watching sports those exist for a reason. And so I think anything that's kind of contrary to that idea around guys playing

with their kids more and talking about their feelings and volunteering in their community, I think people get really excited about that idea.

Diane Atwood: And what are some of the partnerships that you've had?

Keegan Albaugh: We've had a bunch in terms of different programs and different organizations. Some of the ones that I'm excited about that we're working with right now, the Vermont Women's Fund and the Vermont Network, they do work around domestic violence and sexual abuse. And I think people are really interested around one, this healthy masculinity image that we're putting out around being a man and being masculine and also being loving and caring and empathetic and being with our kids. And additionally, I think folks are really interested in the gender equity work. There's been a lot of research around how men make on average more per hour than women do and how a lot of that is tied to when a child is born. Women are the ones who have more leave if they're lucky. And they're the ones taking time off from work, they're the ones who are more likely to leave the workforce for a few years. And then when they go back there's all these lost wages or they need more flexible jobs, they can't take on more demanding ones because they need to be the ones who pick their kids up from school or take them to doctor's appointments. Any new way of being where, hey, men, this is also what's normalized. You know, you taking time off from work and you coming to playgroups, and when you have a question, you reaching out to your network of dads. So, that way it just doesn't become the default responsibility of mothers to be doing. And so looking at our work through that lens as well.

Diane Atwood: So, when you work with other organizations, you together, maybe develop programming, but you also get funding.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, and I think that's for us moving forward, as we have some partnerships who we've done a few activities here and there with. But now looking at, hey, how can we do some more meaningful work together? Like we'll be collaborating with the Vermont Network. They have this pilot program they're setting up around having crucial conversations around gender equity or domestic violence or taking care of yourself and creating a space, because a lot of times the missing piece of some of these conversations is men, like a group of men. And so providing space where it's like, hey, we have 600 men, and let's create spaces for men to be talking about these issues, not only so they can be more informed and better suited for these conversations and have a better

understanding themselves, but also they're raising children. And how are we empowering them to be having these conversations and feeling confident that they can talk about these issues with their kids? You're hitting a couple of different generations at the same time, too, which makes the work really powerful.

Diane Atwood: So Dad Guild has really evolved from those beginning moments when you were just brainstorming. It's far more than just supporting new dads. It's really getting dads involved.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. That's always been our vision. I think if you look back, like, on our first page of notes, and this is where I think Nick and I work well together, because if you sit me down, I'll draw you the map of all of the things that we are doing and that we're going to be doing. And Nick's the one who's like, Keegan, that's great, and let's just do one thing. You've got to start with one thing. We have this really strong vision for what Vermont fatherhood can look like and how we can really become a nation's leader and how we're involving dads. But it all started with, hey, let's just start with meeting up at a playground. Let's start with getting guys together to play board games. And yeah, it's evolved, but it's definitely all been part of our long-term strategy as well because now we're getting to a point where there's guys who come out who want to sit around in a circle and talk about how they're feeling. But then there's also the guys who just want to come throw a Frisbee around and like, cool, let's provide avenues into our community for whatever the need may be.

Diane Atwood: And then there are the activist dads.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah. So, trying to keep getting more avenues and keep pushing people to take that next step as well.

Diane Atwood: So, we should tell people how they can learn more. You've got the website, which is DadGuild.org?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, you can go to our website and you can learn about what we're doing. Sign up for our newsletter there. We're on Facebook, just look up Dad Guild and on Instagram @Dad Guild. And then we have a podcast. Our second episode should be coming out soon. We just released the first one in May. It's called Modern Pop, a Dad Guild Podcast, and that can be found wherever you find your podcast these days.

Diane Atwood: Do you have to live in Vermont in order to be a member?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, although we had a virtual check-in the other weekend. Someone from, I think it was Georgia came because they had a friend. They had asked, can my friend come? And I was like, yeah, sure, that sounds great. But, yeah, the intention is for Vermonters, and also we'll continue to explore that because we don't want to become too big. But part of that long-term vision is, hey, if there are communities outside of Vermont where people are looking for fatherhood support, what can we do to kind of help support you in creating something or getting something going, so I think that is work that we're interested in as well.

Diane Atwood: Yeah, there are some elements of dad killed that would work universally. And then there are others like your meetups in person that have to be within the community. But people from around the world can access your podcast, could sign up for your newsletter because the newsletter just doesn't list events.

Keegan Albaugh: This is very true.

Diane Atwood: So, you offer an incredible amount of resources?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, and I think that's something, we'll be putting more and more resources on our website in the months ahead now that our capacity has increased because recognizing, whether it's social anxiety or scheduling conflicts, or geographic location, that we don't want those barriers to be the reason why someone's not getting resources or hearing people talk about fatherhood. So, look for more resources coming onto our website soon.

Diane Atwood: Are you doing a lot of this by yourself at this point? You're the only paid employee. Is that what I call you, an employee?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, I am an employee now, so, yeah, I do the bulk of it. And then Nick, he's taking the lead on the podcast and does the editing and all that. And we have some really fantastic Board members that have, each has their own passions and support things happening in the Dad Guild world. And then as we're growing, too, we're also going to be looking to the dads within our network, too. How can those folks give back or share what they're passionate about with the community?

Diane Atwood: Right. Okay. And you do have an office now?

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, it's a shared workspace. I mean, this is my basement, but I also have a shared workspace, but, yeah, just a space to go. We do have dreams of one day having an actual physical space that can be multipurpose, where we can have playgroups there, we can have meetings there, have groups there, do workshops, and also use it as an office. Uh, hopefully, that day will come sometime.

Diane Atwood: And maybe you'll get enough funding to be able to have more than one employee.

Keegan Albaugh: That would be great. Yeah. We have some ideas of how we want that, how that could look. But we'll see what happens.

Diane Atwood: And your Board of three is now a Board of? Six. Okay. Are there any questions that you were hoping I would ask that I failed to.

Keegan Albaugh: I can't think of any. That seemed to cover most of the bases.

Diane Atwood: Even if you weren't my son-in-law, I think you're doing amazing things.

Keegan Albaugh: Well, thanks. I appreciate hearing that.

Diane Atwood: Yeah, you're a great role model, too. And I guess you have found your passion. Maybe there'll be a food truck on the side.

Keegan Albaugh: I'm done with the food truck thing. I was going to say one thing that's really cool is that Coraline, who's now six, that for her the past few years, the norm for her is that most weekends she's going to this Dad Guild playgroup. Dad's going out to meet with a bunch of other dads. For her, that's become normal, that she looks forward to and gets excited about is a bunch of dads getting together on playgrounds or going into the woods with our kids. And to me, knowing that for her is the baseline, that's just what dads do. It's like, oh, man, that's awesome because I don't think a lot of kids get that same, you know, their dad might be involved, but just the idea of a bunch of dads coming together for her, it's just really cool that that's what she will now expect of men in terms of when they become parents and they're caregivers. It just really warms my heart when I hear her get excited about going to playgroups or ask about them.

Diane Atwood: So I'm curious, where did you all go this weekend?

Keegan Albaugh: We had a playground playgroup at a park up in Burlington. Battery Park. We had like 16 dads come out to that. We had a bubble machine where it was blowing bubbles all through the park. And yeah, it was fun. All the kids were just running around chasing them, and I got to talk with a bunch of dads. That was fun.

Diane Atwood: And what will you dads be doing in the upcoming weeks? You've got some events that are just for the dads? The kids stay home.?

Keegan Albaugh: It's a busy time of year with school ending, but we do have a fundraiser coming up at the end of this month. Two of our Board members are also comedians in the community, so they're doing some stand-up and the topics will be around parenthood. And there's a storyteller who's going to be coming and talking about fatherhood and is going to share a bit more about what we're doing here at Dad Guild. And, yeah, one of the dads in our community, he runs a coffee shop in town who's going to open up that night for us and it should be a great night.

Diane Atwood: Sounds like fun. It does. If you need somebody to come and watch the kids, just call me. Only takes me 4 hours to get there.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, we could always use more of that.

Diane Atwood: Well, thank you for taking the time. I know you've got a busy schedule in between Dad Guild responsibilities and dad responsibilities. And I have no doubt that, yes, Dad Guild will continue to be really successful and that you're going to be helping dads not only throughout the state of Vermont, but everywhere.

Keegan Albaugh: Well, thanks for giving me the opportunity. I always love sharing what we're doing and yeah, hopefully, someone listens and is like, oh, that's really cool.

Diane Atwood: Alrighty. Well, thank you. Have a wonderful day, have fun, and I hope you get some downtime, too.

Keegan Albaugh: Yeah, me too.

Diane: That brings us to the end of this episode of the Catching Your Memories podcast. Many thanks to Keegan Albaugh for sharing his experiences of being a new dad and how that led to co-founding and leading the non-profit organization

Dad Guild. You'll find more information about Dad Guild and how to get in touch at DadGuild.org.

If you'd like to read a transcript of this episode, go to CatchingYourMemories.com/podcast. Be sure to come back in two weeks for another episode of Catching Your Memories.

And if you have stories or memories you would rather not share in a podcast but would like to preserve for your family, I also record personal interviews. You can learn more about that service at CatchingYourMemories.com.

This podcast was created, produced, recorded, and edited by me ... Diane Atwood. Catching Your Memories — The interview of a lifetime.